

Role of the UN in Global Conflict Prevention and Mediation

"Those who know how to win are more numerous than those who know how to make proper use of their victories".

- Polybius

Introduction

Conflict prevention in international politics is the mainstay and one of the primary enunciated goals of the UN charter, which has been eternally committed to conflict prevention, thereby protecting generations of mankind from the dreadful and pervasively atrocious impact of war. In the current times, preventive initiatives go beyond the horizons of conventional peace talks, to include the UN departments dealing with multi-spectral disciplines, viz restoration of peace zones in insurgency infested areas, elimination of poverty, human rights etc. The UN has taken a prudent decision of not being the first responder and graduating thereon to eliminating the 'cause celebre' of conflicts in international politics. It had a paramount mission to create a sustainable peaceful environment in this universe. The UN Security Council is primarily responsible for global peace and security. The UN has helped in the slow down and eventual cessation of conflicts by efficiently using local intelligence through the governing bodies, tracking and mitigating potential issues of 'flashpoints' amongst affected parties, with resourceful mediation and intercession, before they get worse.

The UN has essentially been highlighting the positive impact and consequences of using its diplomatic tools with complete synergy of member states for termination of conflicts, to ensure a peaceful, progressive and secure environment for its society. External conflicts have different origins, as they frequently emerge with claims for resources and territories, imposition of certain restrictions on resource utilization by the neighboring countries, turbulence created by demographic imbalance, ethnic and communal strife, exodus of immigrants through coercion or otherwise, factional feuds, maritime contentious issues etc, with consequent implications on regional and international politics. Meanwhile, internal conflicts are generally attributed to intolerance by radical factions, vested interests of political parties, racial discrimination, etc which is directly proportional to the level of literacy in that country. Poverty, financial decadence, scarcity of natural resources, fragmentation of political entities, break-down of law and order machinery, corruption and mis-governance, rebel factions and other socio-economic factors are some of the reasons which give birth to skirmishes, localized conflicts and small scale hybrid wars.

Reflections of Conflict Zones

In the 20th Century, the classic conflagrations have reduced relatively. There are large numbers of skirmishes flash points in the world, however; conventional armed conflicts between countries have nearly died out, thereby mitigating the fatalities and injuries caused, which have also reduced comparatively. At the inception stages of the 21st Century, there was a conspicuous difference of lesser casualties, which revealed perceptible changes in the levels of conflicts. An extremely large segment of casualties ascribe to ailments and malnutrition, rather than mortal combat.

There have been substantial endeavors made for prevention of wars between nations, attributed to astute diplomacy for detente, including peaceful dialogues, arbitration, track two parleys for reconciliation and global mediation. The only worrying common denominator in any envisaged threat manifestation has been that the terrorist activities have enhanced after 9/11 incident. However, specifically it would be pertinent to note that the casualties arising out of conflicts are greater than those ascribed to asymmetric incidents. There are myriad attributes to ensuring quick resolution of problem areas for potential conflicts, as the obvious advantages are manifold to the society and the state.

Resolution of Conflicts by United Nations Peacekeeping Forces

The UN endeavors to alleviate conflicts, through its unambiguous advocacy of peace and progression and reconciliatory intercession between adversarial factions. UN initiatives have been largely credible and assume tremendous significance as an international peace keeping/ enforcement organization, primarily as the weaponization and arsenals have grown multifold with acquisition of lethal killing agents to exterminate the opponents. Chemical and biological agents have presumably been used in the ongoing protracted hybrid Syrian war in the Middle East region, to decimate and degrade the capacity of combatants to sustain conflict in the battle zones, which has been given wide coverage by the media. The collateral damage extends to the civilians and children in the war zone. The UN investigators in Syria have probed the apparent chemical attack and have given the samples to a specialized network of laboratories that can look for evidence of the weapons; also researchers are looking for evidence of such attacks in soil, clothing, and blood and urine samples. The UN has convened the meetings of the Security Council to address this critical issue and gross violation of war ethics and human rights, thereby undertaking instrumentation of stern measures by adopting a resolution in the UN General Assembly to ban use of inhuman toxic agents against mankind, to prevent the contagion of particulate by poisonous contamination of areas affecting human lives and future generations.

The instrumentation for peace and security by the UN is predominantly through the diplomatic tools of harmonized mediation & resolution, primarily protecting the civilians, ensuring proper process of disarmament and non-resurgence of radicalized rebel groups, supporting legitimate governments to progressively attain a peaceful environment, thereby accentuating economic prosperity.

Poverty Eradication & Literacy

There is a realization in the UN that majority of conflicts take place where poverty is severe and there is abundance scarcity of regional resources. Therefore, the UN has a sacred mandate to assist in rehabilitation of impoverished segments of society, emancipation of women in multifaceted growth oriented activities, safeguarding the environment and supporting liberal entities. Illiteracy generates a non-harmonious and highly volatile psyche in the population. The nations with higher illiteracy trajectory are relatively more vulnerable and far less incapable of making the correct choice of a dynamic leader contributing towards good governance and prosperity of the nation. UN has already developed policies to advocate and provide access to education through plethora of UN ECOSOC and the UNICEF Programmes respectively. ECOSOC happens to be an important organization of the UN, which is responsible for taking all pervasive measures on socio-economic issues, growth oriented development and implementation of internationally agreed development goals. UNICEF programs are globally popular, as they emphasize on developing major community-level services, promoting health and well-being of children. The UN inclusively guarantees justice, peace, upholds the basic moral privileges of the population, acknowledges their basic freedom, without any proclivities to gender, racial bias or religious innuendos.

Environment Protection

According to the UN, more effective handling of environmental issues of biodiversity, ecosystems, conservation of natural assets could possibly avoid conflicts. The adverse impact of 'Global Warming' would inadvertently integrate all societies in the world, especially with many nations afflicted with cataclysms, coastal hurricanes and earthquakes, also tormented by torrential rains and floods, melting of glaciers, etc. There has to be greater unanimity in comprehending global environmental hazards, by asking a large number of NGOs/ corporate organizations/ institutions to cooperate extensively and conjointly address environmental issues, as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Global Disarmament & Control of Proliferation of Weapons

The nuclear attack by USA in August 1945 during the World War II was done to ensure cessation of hostilities between the warring nations of the world by bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The nuclear arsenals in essence have unfortunately multiplied with large stockpiles, since weaponization has enhanced phenomenally, as a means of 'guarantee of security' to nations, being an aftermath of the World War. However, the UN has formulated certain comprehensive policies, which are incumbent on nations to comply, in order to ensure a more secure world. The UN simultaneously has been exploring the chances of having meetings and conventions between the world leaders of member states, where the foremost objective would be to attain disarmament deals. The recent détente was witnessed through astute and most intensive diplomatic parleys between the USA and North Korea in 2018.

Endeavors by UN for Cessation of Conflicts

The UN believes that there may be certain complex situations wherein, there is hardly any option, but to initiate peace enforcement actions, to obviate any chances of raising the threshold of a near 'Armageddon' condition of instability and turmoil. However, military peacekeeping forces will only take such initiatives as a last recourse, where it will have greater envisaged dividends. It is also an imperative to comprehend and identify the causes in every 'risk scenario' of undertaking peacekeeping/ enforcement operations. For such issues, the UN will require comprehensive investigation, with complete intelligence and thorough knowledge, as also effective implementation with detailed consideration for successful execution of modus operandi. The UNPKO must gain meaningfully in these operations by using certain tactical military stratagems, as also financial alleviation of the various ethnic groups, conforming to local environmental dynamics. The UN fortunately has already a refined and much better understanding regarding the most appropriate design of operations to be used against the targeted outfit.

The forces of UNPKO must act with alacrity in synergy with the local government in any given situation, by mobilization of government assets for optimal gains. The capability to react swiftly is a tactical imperative, after being warned of an imminent turmoil/dangerous situation. It is necessary to be equipped with modern digitized early warning systems for better reaction proficiency and effectiveness of the UNPKO. The UN Secretariat requires greater authority to execute operations efficiently, with better fighting equipment, mobility and communications, as also 'state of art' early warning systems to be forearmed for any contingencies. The policy formulation enables the UN to use consolidated resources and consequently mobilizing them from various identified institutions and civil society.

Shortcomings & Dilemmas in the UN

A serious thought has been given to having 'Conflict Prevention and Mediation with Protection of Civilians' as the foremost responsibilities in the UN. Also, that UNPKO should embody a full bandwidth of responses, with Political Solutions guiding the deployment of forces, a more robust and inclusive Security Partnership to be evolved and lastly that the UN Secretariat must be relatively field focused and Force Centric in its outlook. The UN has been quite ineffective and seems defunct, when a comparison is made to recent developments of new strategic alignments and economic interests, as evident in the G20 Summit and also in the global institutions of finance, viz the World Bank and the IMF. Within the UN the introspection has started for an enhanced role with greater clarity for the UNPKO by enhancing the political vigilance towards sustainable peace. There has to be a more coherent approach to empowerment of field force commanders to conceptualize planning strategies and execute them with better tactical support and modern equipment with combat responsive logistics systems. The challenging assignments for the UNPKO will keep enhancing its role in the conflict zones, which requires being strategized, strengthened and sustained through synergized plans.

Conclusion

The reduction in conflicts in recent past is accredited to vital improvement in the global preventive diplomacy, peace management initiatives and aggressive domain policies exercised by the UN, under the stewardship of the Secretary General. Specifically, there has been an endeavor in the following domain:

- An advancement and upgradation in the UN multifaceted peace talks, with mediation and electoral support strengthened
- New peacebuilding architecture is been established with adequate funding, Regional Preventive Diplomacy Offices being opened in African and Asian regions.
- Enhancement in the number of nations under jurisdiction of the UN, volunteering aid and undertaking reconciliatory/ mediatory roles to pacify conflicting sides into peace agreements.
- Integrated operational teams have been adjudicated responsibilities to synergize the Political and Operational multi-dimensional roles for attainment of objectives.

The peacekeeping operations involve a holistic integration of regional institutions, which have a 'critical and crucial' role in the success of achieving the objectives, along with the world financial organizations and effective economic, material and human resource contribution by the member states/various other nations. The UN has a premier universal authority as a world class institution with its unique credentials to usher peace and stability on this planet.

About the Author



Lt Gen SK Gadeock, AVSM (Retd) was commissioned on 11 June 1977 into 12 GUARDS (ATGMs). He is an alumnus of NDA and IMA and has done his MSc (Defence Studies), MPhil and Diploma in Senior Level Defence Management and completed PhD Thesis in Defence & Strategic Studies. He was ADC to the President of India, having served two Presidents from 1981-83, Adjutant of National Defence Academy, commanded an Independent Armoured Brigade and an Infantry Division. He was Logistics Advisor to Botswana Defence Force in Africa and Lieutenant General General Staff (LGGS) in a Command Headquarters. Held coveted staff & command appointments in the Army and Joint Services Institutions. He was Commandant, Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington in 2014, where he was conferred with many national and lifetime achievement awards for manifold contributions to the military institutions, society and towards nation building. The 'Presidents Colors' were bestowed upon DSSC in 2016 by Hon'ble Shri Pranab Mukherjee. At London, the General Officer was honored with the 'Distinguished Fellowship Award', by the Institute of Directors. He can be reached at skgadeock@amity.edu

RECOMMENDED READINGS

